

# DCFS Weekly Update From the State Office

Friday, December 1, 2000

## From My Perspective

*By Ken Patterson*

I have several updates today, as follows:

As Governor Leavitt begins his third term of office, he's approaching the job as if he were newly elected. He is establishing a transition team and creating a review process for all of state government. We usually think of transition teams as occurring when administrations are changing. But the Governor is undertaking a transition effort between his second and third term. Nolan Karras will lead the transition effort. Mr. Dell Loy Hansen of Logan will lead the Department of Human Services (DHS) Team. I will make an overview presentation to Mr. Hansen's team next week regarding DCFS' role and services within DHS. The committee may do contacts similar to stakeholder interviews conducted as a part of our Qualitative Case Review process.

Douglas West will be retiring as Robin's Deputy Director in January. On Wednesday, Robin named Mark Ward to be Doug's successor. Mark has over 18 years of public service in Missouri. For the past seven years he has been the planning and budget director for the Governor in Missouri. So, we are getting somebody with considerable government experience and knowledge of how Human Service organizations work. Missouri is often recognized as having one of the better Human Services Departments in the country.

We have now completed the second round of Qualitative Case Reviews in Western and Southwest Regions. The results are not final yet, but it appears that both regions improved significantly over their baseline scores of the previous year.

## Announcement of Contractor for Conflict of Interest Investigations

*By Abel Ortiz*

This morning, Ken Patterson signed the contract awarding **Sipapu Associates** as the provider to complete CPS investigations on out-of-home care providers and DCFS employees. The agency has a lot of child welfare experience and has a good understanding of the role of foster parents in our system. Earl Bassett (former DCFS Deputy Director) and Keith Stroud (former Mental Health Director) are the directors of Sipapu. They will be spending time in the regions in the next few weeks to get information on how Out-of-Home Care runs in the different regions and to shadow some CPS workers. We are hoping to get a contract signed early in December so they can begin receiving referrals on January 1, 2001.

## Nothing Below the Line

*By Richard Anderson*

I just realized that not everyone has had this exciting conversation with me where I draw a very simple graph and make an extremely big deal over it. Just so I know that

everyone has had the chance to share this unequaled experience, I wanted to share this with all of you. Here is what I believe we are accomplishing as we actually use the Practice Model skills, adjust our practice to the guides in the Qualitative Case Reviews, and meet the federal and state requirements that support both of the other two. We are establishing a standard of quality for child welfare direct practice.

Here is the extremely simple graph:



Now you are enlightened! It all becomes very clear to you. No...?

The graph lines below the straight line represent practice and skills below some standard, and the graph lines above the straight line represent practice and skills that are above some standard. I hope I don't offend anyone when I say that on any particular day or with some specific family or on certain presenting issues, any of us can be above or below a standard of practice and skills. Our problem for many years is that we have not had a clear definition of the straight line for real day-to-day practice skills. The nice thing about that is that we can be as good as we tell ourselves we are. The problem is not really knowing how good or ineffective we may be.

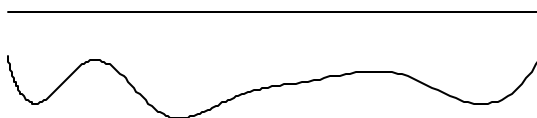
Together we are defining the straight line, the standard for practice skills. Here are some of the skills that, when practiced, will prove we are at or above the line: engaging children, families, and partners in the change process; having a functioning child and family service team; establishing a thorough functional assessment; planning and evaluating together with the family and all participants; and using interventions that produce the most effective outcomes.

I hope everyone agrees that we need a practice standard. We want to have everyone at or above the line. We need the standard to be clear enough that all of us working in DCFS, our close working partners, and the community at large know what to expect. We can guarantee a level of skilled practice to ourselves and to the public. The anticipated benefits will be better outcomes for children and families, greater respect for our organization, and more constant help from each other to stay above the line. And we can go home at the end of each day, knowing how well we have met the requirements of our practice.

The standards will need to be adjusted whenever we discover a better way to provide safety or permanence or well-being. This way we will stay at the forefront of the best skills of our profession.

Want to see my personal graph for skills used in writing weekly updates?

Standard for DCFS Deputy Director's Weekly Update Articles:



# New Court Order Requirements/Efforts to Finalize Permanency Plan—Changes in Federal Out-of-Home Care Regulations, Part 3

*By Cosette Mills, Federal Revenue Manager*

In my previous two articles, I talked about changes in Federal Out-of-Home care regulations pertaining to the removal home and initial court order requirements. In this third article of the series, I'll discuss an important new change in court order requirements applicable to IV-E eligible foster children.

**Regional Out-of-Home Care teams are encouraged to immediately review these requirements in team meetings.** I recommend including the regional eligibility worker(s) in these discussions, if possible.

## Reasonable Efforts to Finalize the Permanency Plan

The Adoption and Safe Families Act included a number of provisions designed to expedite permanency for children in Out-of-Home Care. One of the provisions required the courts to determine if a state agency having custody of a child had made reasonable efforts to finalize the child's permanency plan. A recent change in Federal regulations added strength to this requirement by discontinuing Federal payments for a child if this requirement has not been met.

Specifically, Federal law and regulations require DCFS to obtain a judicial determination annually that the state made reasonable efforts to finalize the child's permanency plan (goal) whether the plan is reunification, adoption, legal guardianship, placement with a fit and willing relative, or placement in another planned living arrangement.

This means that the state must obtain a court order with language to the effect that "reasonable efforts have been made to finalize the permanency plan/goal" within 12 months of the date of removal and at least every 12 months thereafter (based on the date of the last determination). *This is required even if a child's goal is long-term Out-of-Home Care.*

If the judge does not make this determination within the 12-month time frame, Title IV-E funds must stop for each child until an order has been issued.

The Federal government gave states a window of time before Federal funding must discontinue.

**Effective March 27, 2001, Federal reimbursement must stop for all IV-E eligible and reimbursable children who have been in Out-of-Home Care for 12 months or longer who have not had the "reasonable efforts to finalize the permanency plan" finding issued by a court.**

**It is absolutely critical that DCFS Out-of-Home Care teams follow up to ensure that efforts to finalize the permanency plan are being reviewed in court hearings for all IV-E eligible children within required time frames and that required**

**language is included in court orders. If this has not been completed for all IV-E children in care 12 months or longer by April 2001, a **substantial** loss of Federal funding will occur.**

(Please note that DCFS can pay for three IV-E eligible and reimbursable children for the same amount of state funds it takes to fund one child who is not IV-E eligible and reimbursable. IV-E funding is critical in order for DCFS to meet the needs of children and families!)

***For further information on Title IV-E eligibility, please contact your regional eligibility worker.***

## To Make Your Life Easier...Using SAFE Optimally

*By Robert Lewis*

We think that one of the most important influences on making your life easier as you use SAFE has been the staff of the SAFE Help Desk. Through the periods when new versions of SAFE were being introduced almost monthly, the Help Desk was always just a phone call away. There were many frustrating moments for region staff—new ways to do things, system bugs—on top of normal pressures. Through all of this, the staff of the Help Desk kept their cool, didn't take user frustrations personally (well, hardly ever), listened, found solutions, gave needed information, and were advocates for system users with the SAFE developers.

Let's get better acquainted with the persons who are currently the primary voices on the phone at (801) 538-4141.

- ***Lori Jones***: Lori has been on the Help Desk since its start in October 1996. Before that she was an eligibility tech supervisor in Salt Lake. She feels badly for callers when they have problems, but likes helping them. She loves her family (especially being a grandma) and loves to go camping. She collects elephants and is a major rock hound.
- ***Kim Pinnegar***: Kim came to the Help Desk at the same time as Lori. Prior to that she was a file room supervisor in the Ogden DCFS office. She knows the importance of good case documentation. She loves her three daughters and three grandchildren. She has been taking classes from the Western Governor's University over the Internet, and hopes to soon graduate with a degree in LAN administration.
- ***Jana Redington***: Jana just started with the Help Desk, and was formerly a senior assistant caseworker in the West Valley office. She states that she really enjoys helping staff understand SAFE better. Jana is a working mom with two boys, ages eight and two years. She loves to jet ski at Bear Lake with her family.

Two others who have been working the Help Desk phones, ***Kathy Tollett*** and ***Mike Bednarek***, will be heard from less in the Help Desk capacity, and will now spend more time with SAFE training and systems analysis/testing respectively.

## New SAFE Help Desk Phone Hours

To give emphasis to region support throughout the implementation phases of SAFE, we have maintained the same hours for phone coverage, in spite of major staffing reductions. With SAFE operational, we are now changing the standard hours for phone coverage to allow us to use available staff time more efficiently to better cover a broader range of user support functions.

We have designed the new hours based on the history of call volumes at different times of the day. Here are the new standard phone coverage hours for the Help Desk, beginning Monday, December 4 2000:

Start:	8:00 a.m.
Lunch break:	12:00 noon to 12:30 p.m.
End:	4:30 p.m.

We will return voice mail messages promptly if you call during times when the phones are not covered.

## SAFE On-Call Help Desk Services

Beginning in January 2001, we will test an on-call service for the Help Desk. This will provide some support for SAFE usage during evenings and weekends. More information about this will be provided in the near future.

## Wrap-Around Services/One-Time Costs

*By Cosette Mills, Federal Revenue Manager*

With the DCFS practice model emphasizing improved assessment of family needs and more effective creation of individualized service plans, a need is also developing for more individualized funding options for unique wrap-around services or one-time costs.

Administration is in the process of exploring existing funding sources and funding procedures in an effort to create funding mechanisms and funding policies that can better respond to the unique needs of children and families. To assist in developing these policies and in identifying funding streams, we need feedback on what types of funding options regional staff need in order to get better outcomes for children and families (*besides just more money*). **We'd appreciate responses to the following questions, and any additional feedback you'd like to provide:**

1. What are some examples of unique wrap-around services that would have resulted in better outcomes for a child or family that you were NOT able to provide because funding was not available?
2. What are some examples of unique one-time costs that would have resulted in better outcomes for a child or family that you were NOT able to provide because funding was not available?

3. What barriers have prevented partner agencies from contributing services or funding to meet the needs of a child or family being served by DCFS?
4. What are some of the specific kinds of funding needs you anticipate in the future to better serve children and families as the practice model is fully implemented?

*Please send your replies via e-mail to Cosette Mills [CWMILLS@hs.state.ut.us] or Caren Frost [CFROST@hs.state.ut.us].*